

General Hood at Spring Hill

A FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY WAR STORY

November 29, 1864

(Copyright, 1904, by G. L. Kilmer.)
SPRING HILL doesn't figure in the list of decisive actions of the civil war, but it would if results were taken into account in place of desperate fighting and heavy losses.

There were not many thoughtful people in the Confederate states in the autumn of 1864 who did not believe their "jig was up" when Atlanta succumbed, following Vicksburg and Chattanooga in the west, and Grant planted the victorious army of Gettysburg on the south of James river and stayed there, with Richmond all but in his grasp. Yet there were some bold spirits who held that the god of battles might see it that the weaker side should have one more chance, with fair play and no favor, and one of those was General J. B. Hood, that dashing, daring Texan who saucily made faces around the corner at Sherman after the latter had hustled him out of Atlanta by giving him the toe of the boot, as it were.

After two weeks of a game of "fox and geese" Hood found himself in the presence of a large body of Sherman's troops in the mountains of northwest Georgia and determined to offer battle, but when he canvassed his own soldiers he found that the spirit of fighting had vanished. Repeated disaster and retreat had filled the hearts of his battle-scarred veterans with the prevailing hopelessness. In this crisis nothing would fit so well as the motto, "Be bold, be bold, and evermore be bold!" and of boldness Hood had an apparently exhaustless supply. He resolved to give Sherman the slip once more and march rapidly to Nashville, Louisville and Cincinnati, strike terror to the north, win the smiles of France, who waited a good excuse for aiding the Confederacy, and bring up at last on Grant's rear in northern Virginia after crossing Ohio and the Blue Ridge. Was ever the dream of a daring military adventurer wilder than

corps, under General J. M. Schofield, 10,000 strong, which he detached from his main army before starting for the sea.

In point of fact, Hood went around the Federal army, supposed to be guarding the southern border of Tennessee, and once across the river made for Columbia, on Duck river, the direct route to Nashville. The ever alert Forrest preceded him and was on the point of seizing the crossings of the river when the advance of the Federal army under Schofield, falling back by forced marches upon Nashville, came up to dispute the way. Schofield held and fortified Columbia.

Meanwhile General J. H. Wilson, a cavalryman under Sheridan in Virginia, had reached Tennessee to lead Thomas' cavalry. When he reached the front along Duck river he found his troopers crossing above Columbia, east, to seize roads leading to Spring Hill, in Schofield's rear, so as to cut him off from Nashville. Wilson warned Schofield to abandon Columbia and, strangely enough, drew back his own force by a route farther east through Hurt's Corners and Mount Carmel, leaving the road open to Forrest to dash on to Spring Hill.

But Schofield, for all, had the inside track to the key point and, acting on Wilson's warning, had sent General Stanley with all speed back from Columbia toward Spring Hill. It was the 29th of November, the day of all others in 1864 when, if luck counts at all in war, the Confederacy had a last chance. At noon that day Stanley's men double quicked into Spring Hill and soon began to fight with Forrest's troopers for the mastery. Forrest was beaten, and Stanley held the road open.

Yet Forrest was not Hood's best card in this game. At the head of his leading division, a crack body of men under the intrepid General Cleburne, he had crossed Duck river at Huey's and at noon of that day was marching boldly northwestward to the pike between Columbia and Spring Hill and between Stanley's isolated division and Schofield's main force at Columbia. Moreover, he had left the corps of General S. D. Lee south of Duck river and in front of Columbia to attack Schofield and push him along the pike into the trap prepared for him at Spring Hill. At that moment there was nothing to stay the march of Hood's 40,000 Confederates on Nashville, Louisville and the north except Stanley's band of 4,000 men at Spring Hill and a mob of unorganized recruits and convalescents at Nashville with Thomas.

The hope of the west lay with Schofield, and he was virtually surrounded and cut off at Columbia. Hood's hope—the forlorn chance of the south—lay in placing a wall of bayonets across the pike and shutting Schofield off at Spring Hill, when the Federal army in the west would be at his mercy. Calling Generals Cheatham and Cleburne to his side, Hood directed their eyes upon the pike where Schofield's wagons and their infantry guards were moving from Columbia back to Spring Hill. Said he to Cheatham: "General, do you see the enemy there, retreating rapidly to escape us? Go with your corps, take possession of that pike at or near Spring Hill. . . . Do this at once."

His subordinates moved away to obey this command and himself to order up another corps, and this accomplished, Schofield's army would be lost. Forrest's cavalry held all of the crossroads from the pike north of Spring Hill, in a line east and south, to Duck river, having howled Wilson's men off to the northeast out of reach. From 3 o'clock until dark there were constant skirmishing and some heavy fighting near Spring Hill between Stanley's men and those of Cheatham and Forrest, but Hood returned to the spot at dusk only to find that Cheatham had not put his line across the pike. Cleburne's division that had been relied on for that feat had blundered in the first attempt and then come to a dead standstill. Hood brought with him the

Unrecorded History.
Aladdin had just rubbed his wonderful lamp. "Get me at once," he said as his faithful genie appeared, "a breath of fresh air from a New York tenement."
Wondering at his master's imbecility, the genie disappeared forever.—Brooklyn Life.

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Leading division of Stewart's corps and, learning of Cleburne's failure, ordered that body of troops to form on Cleburne's line so as to carry it across the pike. But by this time Stanley had given the Confederates a taste of genuine fighting that stirred up their caution.

Their assaults on the pike at Spring Hill had been stubbornly repulsed, and Stewart went about his work on the slow and sure plan of reconnoitering. In the end his troops went into bivouac along the pike and not across it.

As the evening rolled on Schofield's wagons and men hurrying away from Columbia marched along the pike under the eyes of the pickets of Cheatham and Stewart and were fired upon, but they zealously went their way. Hood at length called upon Forrest to do the work the infantry had failed in, but when the redoubtable trooper got his men in line they had no ammunition and would not advance.

A band of about 2,000 under General Jackson galloped on northward and attempted to cut the pike beyond Spring Hill, but were repulsed, and from midnight to daylight of the 30th Schofield's men retreated, virtually unopposed, in the presence of superior numbers of their foes resting idly within earshot of their march. For General Sherman to have counted in advance upon such unexplainable conduct on the part of Cleburne, Cheatham and Forrest, with Hood among them and at their head, would have been madman's folly. But that, and that alone, saved Tennessee and the north and checked Hood's daring adventure.

The most reasonable explanation of Hood's conduct on the night of Nov. 29 is that he tired himself out physically during the afternoon, and his usual high courage oozed out with his waning energy.

So slight a thing as dyspepsia lost a great battle for Napoleon. Why may it not be true that a slight overstrain of some sensitive faculty of Hood on that busy afternoon prevented a reversal of Confederate fortunes in the west and warded off a grave Federal disaster? GEORGE L. KILMER.

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"What are you going at next?"
"I'm going to invent another indelible ink that can't be erased with my new eraser. I tell you there is money in this patent business if you only go about it the right way."—London Globe.

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TIDE TABLE, DECEMBER

Low Water.				High Water.					
Date.	A. M.	P. M.		Date.	A. M.	P. M.			
	h. m.	ft.	h. m.	ft.	h. m.	ft.	h. m.		
Thursday	1:03	1.3	2:12	2.1	Thursday	1:38	7.8	8:06	6.4
Friday	2:07	1.7	3:17	1.3	Friday	2:34	8.1	9:17	6.5
Saturday	3:10	2.0	4:18	0.5	Saturday	3:28	8.5	10:22	6.7
SUNDAY	4:08	2.1	5:12	-0.3	SUNDAY	4:10	9.1	11:19	7.0
Monday	5:04	2.3	6:00	-1.0	Monday	5:11	9.4	12:12	7.2
Tuesday	6:58	2.5	6:48	-1.4	Tuesday	6:11	7.1	1:00	7.3
Wednesday	7:46	2.7	7:30	-1.4	Wednesday	7:10	7.3	12:33	9.3
Thursday	8:30	2.9	8:13	-1.3	Thursday	8:14	7.3	1:15	9.0
Friday	9:15	3.1	8:54	-0.9	Friday	9:20	7.2	1:55	8.7
Saturday	10:00	3.3	9:32	-0.4	Saturday	10:32	7.2	2:37	8.2
SUNDAY	11:34	3.4	10:00	0.2	SUNDAY	11:32	7.1	3:17	7.5
Monday	12:10	3.4	10:50	0.7	Monday	12:43	7.0	4:02	7.0
Tuesday	13:11	3.0	11:30	1.3	Tuesday	13:50	7.0	4:53	6.2
Wednesday	14:11	2.8	12:32	3.4	Wednesday	14:58	7.0	5:53	5.7
Thursday	15:13	1.8	1:35	3.0	Thursday	15:7	7.1	7:05	5.4
Friday	16:14	2.3	2:33	2.6	Friday	16:7	7.2	8:15	5.5
Saturday	17:20	2.6	3:30	1.8	Saturday	17:8	7.5	9:24	5.6
SUNDAY	18:30	2.9	4:18	1.1	SUNDAY	18:9	7.8	10:20	5.9
Monday	19:35	3.1	5:04	0.4	Monday	19:10	8.2	11:14	6.3
Tuesday	20:45	3.1	5:48	-0.3	Tuesday	20:10	8.4	12:1	6.7
Wednesday	21:57	3.1	6:28	-0.8	Wednesday	21:11	8.9	0:00	6.7
Thursday	22:22	3.1	7:09	-1.1	Thursday	22:04	7.1	12:18	6.9
Friday	23:7	3.1	7:50	-1.3	Friday	23:1	7.3	1:00	9.0
Saturday	24:7	3.8	8:30	-1.1	Saturday	24:1	7.6	1:40	8.0
SUNDAY	25:8	3.7	9:15	-0.9	SUNDAY	25:2	7.7	2:27	8.0
Monday	26:9	2.7	9:59	-0.4	Monday	26:3	7.8	3:15	8.1
Tuesday	27:10	2.4	10:45	0.2	Tuesday	27:4	7.9	4:10	7.5
Wednesday	28:11	1.9	11:36	0.9	Wednesday	28:5	7.9	5:15	6.9
Thursday	29:11	1.2	12:38	2.0	Thursday	29:6	8.1	6:28	6.5
Friday	30:14	1.5	1:49	1.6	Friday	30:7	8.1	7:46	6.1
Saturday	31:17	2.1	2:57	1.0	Saturday	31:8	8.3	9:03	6.1



"GO TAKE POSSESSION OF THAT PIKE!"

that? But what was to hinder? Sherman, distance and the scattered Federal troops to be met with on the way? As for the last two obstacles, Hood's soldiers were equal to the march, and equal also, he believed, to any improvised force that could be raked up to impede him in all the west. Sherman himself, he believed, would turn and go back south, and that is just what he did.

Hood marched westward across Alabama 150 miles, victualing and equipping his army en route for their wonderful venture into hostile territory. By the middle of November he was crossing the Tennessee at Florence, Ala. His numbers, including the cavalry that would join him, were about 40,000. Sherman believed that his lieutenant, General Thomas, with a corps of about 12,000 men under General D. M. Stanley, and an indefinite force of mounted and dismounted cavalry, could hold the line of the Tennessee river and keep Hood south of it. He afterward added the Twenty-third

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Leave	ASTORIA	Arrive
7:45 a.m.	for Portland and way points	11:30 a.m.
6:10 p.m.		10:30 p.m.
SEASIDE DIVISION		
Leave	ASTORIA	Arrive
11:35 a.m.	for Seaside Direct	5:20 p.m.
Leave	ASTORIA	Arrive
7:15 a.m.	for Warrenton, Hammond, Ft. Stevens, Seaside	10:45 a.m.
5:50 p.m.		7:40 a.m.
Leave	SEASIDE	Arrive
4:30 p.m.	for Astoria Direct	12:30 p.m.
Leave	SEASIDE	Arrive
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9:30 a.m.		7:20 p.m.

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